

COMMONWEALTH *of* VIRGINIA
BOARD OF EDUCATION
P. O. BOX 2120
RICHMOND, VA 23218-2120

December 6, 1999

Sylvia J. Henderson, President
Virginia Association of Elementary School
Principals
2116 Dabney Road, Suite A-4
Richmond, Virginia 23220

Mrs. Consuella Woods, President
Virginia Association of Secondary School
Principals, Inc.
Sandusky Middle School
805 Chinook Place
Lynchburg, Virginia 24502-4999

Sue Glasco, President
Virginia Congress of Parents and Teachers
211 72nd Street
Virginia Beach, Virginia 23451

Emmanuel Bartolotta, President
Virginia School Counselor Association
9007 Golden Sunset Lane
Springfield, Virginia 22153

Dr. Stephen R. Staples, President
Virginia Association of School Superintendents
302 Dare Road
Yorktown, Virginia 23692

Mr. Paul Glavin, President
Virginia Counselors Association
7435 Sabin Drive
Manassas, Virginia 20109

Mrs. Cheri James, President
Virginia Education Association
116 South Third Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

First, let me thank your organizations for your continued dedication to public education in Virginia. During my brief tenure as the President of the Board of Education, I have come to appreciate the work of your organizations to help ensure that Virginia's young people are provided the best possible education. As you are aware, the Board of Education has proposed changes to the Standards of Accreditation (SOA) that attempt to incorporate the suggestions we have heard as a Board while preserving the fundamental principles of our reform efforts.

At the recent public hearings on the current SOA proposal, your organizations issued a joint statement to the Board concerning the use of "multiple criteria" accountability measures that your organizations supported. Let me first thank you for taking the time to review the Board's proposal and to craft a brief response. The Board feels that any legitimate, reasoned suggestions need to be considered as we seek to implement the current reform efforts.

Let me note that the Virginia Board of Education has already proposed allowing the use of other tests for graduation credits, for example, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate, in lieu of Standards of Learning tests, at the student's option. The current Standards of Accreditation also make it clear that in grades K-8 the SOL tests are only one of many factors to be used for promotion or retention decisions. They are not "barrier tests" in those grades and never have been, as you presumably know.

Let me also note that neither school accreditation nor high school graduation are based solely on one test. School accreditation requires a school to meet numerous criteria, all detailed in the Standards of Accreditation. We have added one more component: student achievement as verified on various tests (SOL, AP, IB, etc.). High school graduation requires completion of course work in a specified number of courses. The successful completion of this course work, or the awarding of standard credit, is based on the evaluation of the classroom teacher as have been the practice in the past. To that requirement, we have added passage of certain SOL (or AP or IB, etc.) tests in order to verify that the course work was, in fact, effective in preparing the student for success in college or the workforce. That, in a nutshell, is this Board's vision of accountability.

The Board would like specifics on your vision of accountability. Thus, we request that you submit to us the specific "multiple criteria" that you advocate using for school accreditation and high school graduation. Please address the following key relevant issues in your submission to us:

- 1) If you wish to use other tests, then please specify the tests, how they are graded and how you would use them.
- 2) If you wish to use measures of student achievement that are determined by educators within the school system itself, please explain how these measurements may be verified independently of the school system so that we can be confident about the student's achievement levels.
- 3) If you wish to use criteria for either school accreditation or high school graduation that are *not* based on student achievement, please explain why these measures are better than measurements of student achievement for evaluating schools or determining whether a student is adequately prepared for success in college or in the workforce.
- 4) Please specify also whether, in your vision of accountability, the other criteria you wish to use would override failed SOL (or AP or IB) tests in calculations for either school accreditation or student graduation. If your other criteria would override failed tests, do you believe there should be any consequences for failure on SOL tests, either for the schools or students? Please specify which consequences you favor, if any.

I would be happy to meet with representatives of the signing groups and enter into a constructive dialogue on the specifics of your position.

Again, let me thank you for your continued efforts on behalf of Virginia's public students. I look forward to seeing a specific plan for us to consider in the near future.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely Yours,

Kirk T. Schroder
President
Virginia State Board of Education

cc: Members, Virginia Board of Education
The Honorable James S. Gilmore, III
Honorable Members of the General Assembly of Virginia